

Assessment policy

Introduction

UWC Waterford Kamhlaba (WK) delivers a challenging and transformational educational experience to a diverse cross section of students, inspiring them to create a more peaceful and sustainable future. Students and teachers come to WK from many different countries and regions, receiving their previous education and training in a variety of often strikingly different educational systems. Although WK celebrates and strives to benefit from such educational diversity, it is also important to develop and maintain common standards and practices in our approaches to teaching and learning. This document presents WK's approach to educational assessment, explicating the purpose of assessment, the various types of assessment used and how assessment is presented through grades and reports. As such this document represents a statement of intent and action describing principles and practices for achieving educational goals relating to all aspects of assessment.

The purposes of assessment

Assessment is a general term embracing all methods customarily used to appraise performance of an individual student or group of students. Broadly speaking, assessment has three main purposes: (1) to judge; (2) to decide; and (3) to foster learning.

- (1) **To judge.** This purpose of assessment is for instance to arrive at a standards-referenced judgement, often in the form of a letter, number or percentage. The most visible example of assessment at the judgement level is the academic report, in which teachers and tutors judge students' performance through grades and written comments.
- (2) **To decide.** Assessment is used to inform a decision. At WK, for instance, Form 3 grades inform a decision to invite a student to continue into Form 4, just as Form 5 grades and results of the trial examinations inform the schools decision to accept or regret a student into the IB Diploma programme. WK's entrance tests are another example of assessment at the decision level, as the results of these tests informs our admissions process.
- (3) **To foster learning.** The third level concerns itself with the *impact* of assessment. This purpose can be to (a) motivate a student; (b) give the student an idea of his or her own progress and what might be needed to improve; (c) give second parties (teachers, parents) an idea of a student's academic development and how he or she can best be supported.

Types of assessment

Educational scholarship identifies an important distinction between summative and formative assessment. In this dichotomy, summative assessment stands for assessment at the end of a process while formative assessment is meant to identify scope and potential for development within the learning process. In recent decades, the purposes, uses and methods of assessment in many schools have changed, allowing for variety in the ways students are assessed. The point of gravity has moved from the mere use of summative assessment to a balanced combination of the two. The value of formative assessment is now widely recognised, as it is this type of assessment that best fosters learning, reflection and self-awareness. Formative assessment allows a student to take responsibility over his or her own learning, fostering intellectual independence and academic responsibility. Similarly, the emphasis in assessment has already moved away from merely assessing knowledge and products to the assessment of skills, concepts and understanding. Assessment methods have become more diverse, moving beyond written assessment to include oral, peer, self and group assessments. Figure 1 summarizes the changing emphasis in assessment in a nutshell.

Figure 1: Changing emphasis in assessment

Shift from	Towards
Assessing knowledge	Assessing skills and understanding
Assessing products	Assessing processes
External end of course assessment	Internal during course assessment
Written assessment only	Use of variety of methods and evidence
Pass/fail summative assessment	Formative identification of strengths and weaknesses and recording of positive achievement

Adapted from Klenowski (2002).

Critics of this development argue that assessment in the new constellation is less rigid, reliable and absolute. At the same time it is widely acknowledged that, as the IB argues, “absolute reliability of assessment results, though highly important in its own right, cannot take priority over student learning.” This dilemma was acknowledged by Alec Peterson (who played a significant role in both the establishment of UWC and the IB Diploma programme) when describing the early development of IB Diploma assessment as follows:

What is needed is a process of assessment which is as valid as possible, in the sense that it really assesses the whole endowment and personality of the pupil in relation to the next stage of his life, but at the same time [is] sufficiently reliable to assure pupils, parents and teachers, and receiving institutions that justice is being done. Yet such a process must not, by its backwash effect, distort good teaching, nor be too slow, nor absorb too much of our scarce educational resources.

Assessment practice at WK

Whole school (F1-7)

All WK teachers are aware of the various purposes and types of assessment, and strive to assess students' progress throughout the academic term using a variety of assessment methods. WK acknowledges that the nature of a subject to a large extent dictates the method and form of assessment. Assessment in Mathematics and Science, for instance, will often be different from assessment in the performing Arts. Likewise, the frequency and content load of assessment will be different in the Junior School compared to the Senior School. Subject-specific assessment is organized by subject departments under the direction of the Heads of Department, who submit their departmental arrangements to the Director of Studies.

Assessment at all levels of the school is meant to support and inform learning. Assessment should never be used as a tool for punishment. Teacher feedback is meant to help improve a student's academic performance, and will generally be encouraging in nature. In order to maximize learning from feedback, teachers endeavour to return marked work in a timely manner.

Teachers formally report to colleagues on student's progress twice in an academic term through the process of cycle meetings. The mid-cycle meeting is usually held in week 6 or 7 in a 12/13 week term, with the end-cycle meeting taking place in the pre-final week of term. Mid and end-cycle meetings are convened by the respective Academic Coordinator, with the Deputy Principal and Director of Studies in attendance.

Mid-cycle meetings function as an early response mechanism, focusing on students of concern, while end-cycle meetings evaluate a student's progress in the course of the past term. The purpose of this early response system is to allow observations to be made to students in good time: this will allow and encourage them to convert any concerns into satisfactory or good grades. Mid-cycle indicators are informal and are

not part of a student's academic transcript. Students with one concern are referred to the academic tutor, who will discuss the concern with the student involved. Students with concerns in multiple subjects are raised for general discussion in the mid-cycle meeting. The Academic Coordinator will gather comments from many or all teachers. Ideas on how to proceed are passed on to the student via the tutor and/or Academic Coordinator. At times the tutor or Coordinator may also decide to contact the parents or guardians.

Prior to the end-cycle meeting, teachers are expected to submit term grades for each student they teach. This term grade should be based on a number of assessed pieces of work, assessing a student's performance in a range of assessment methods. These could include classroom tests (short answer responses, multiple choice, essays, etc.), homework assignments, classroom performances and presentations, lab reports etc.

Students of concern are discussed in a similar way as during the mid-cycle meeting.

Teachers also hold regular general staff meetings during the term (usually once a month) and students of concern may also be raised in a designated agenda item during these meetings.

In addition to the academic grade (A-E or 1-7), teachers also provide an effort symbol, with the "+" symbol indicating a good or improving performance, no symbol indicating a satisfactory performance and a "-" symbol indicating an insufficient or deteriorating performance. Effort symbols emphasize a student's behaviour and attitude during the academic term and are meant to encourage and support effective learning.

Academic grades and effort symbols are included in the written reports, which students and parents/guardians receive at the end of each academic term. Teachers also provide a short written account of a student's progress. Such a report is likely to describe the student's progress in the past term, but may also indicate how a student could improve his academic achievement and attitude. The contents of the subject-specific reports are synthesized and summarized in a report written by the academic tutor. Parents and guardians with questions relating to this report are advised to contact their child's academic tutor.

Students with outstanding academic results will be nominated for an Academic Commendation from the Principal. Criteria for an Academic Commendation differ depending on the year group. The final decision on the presentation of an Academic Commendation rests with the Academic Coordinator of that school level.

Junior school (F1-3)

In the junior school, grades range from A to E: A = very good, B = good, C = satisfactory, D = not satisfactory, E = poor. An N indicates that no grade has been awarded. Subjects such as Physical Education, Information Technology and Art also indicate achievement in *sections* of the course with descriptions such as Satisfactory, Good, Excellent, etc. Written reports without grades are provided for Life Skills.

During mid-cycle meeting, students with more than three concerns are raised for discussion. During end-cycle, all students with more than three Ds are discussed, or those students whose academic achievements are seriously deteriorating. In addition, students with behavioural concerns may also be raised during these meetings.

Students receiving nine or more As or pluses for effort are nominated for an Academic Commendation. Students will not receive a commendation when achieving a “minus” in any subject or when the records show a number of unexplained absences.

Form 1 students write short end of year tests in most subjects. These summative tests take place in normal class time. Form 2 and 3 students have longer more formal end of year tests of an hour or more in exam conditions. Form 1-3 end of year exams take place towards the end of term 3.

Admission into the IGCSE programme in Form 4-5 depends on satisfactory progress being made in the course of Form 3. Students and their parents/guardians will receive “early signals” in the course of Form 3 when continuation into the IGCSE programme is deemed problematic.

Middle school (F4-5) – IGCSE programme

During Forms 4 and 5, students study for the internationally recognised University of Cambridge International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) in their chosen subjects. In addition to the IGCSE programme all students will work towards gaining the International Computer Driving License (ICDL) which certifies their computer proficiency. They will also take weekly classes in Life Skills and Physical

Education. Form 4 students take part in community service activities organized from time to time for the whole year group while Form 5 students have a weekly slot in which to contribute to a Community Service of their choice.

Assessment practices are aligned with the assessment philosophy and practices of Cambridge International Examinations and are designed to monitor progress and prepare the student for successful completion of the IGCSE examinations.

Academic grades range from A to F: A = very good, B = good, C = satisfactory, D = not satisfactory, E = poor, F = very poor. An N indicates that no grade has been awarded. Physical Education also indicates achievement in *sections* of the course with descriptions such as Satisfactory, Good, Excellent, etc. Written reports without grades are provided for ICDL and Life Skills in Form 4 and involvement in ComServe in Form 5.

During mid-cycle meeting, students with more than three concerns are raised for discussion. During end-cycle, all students with more than three Ds are discussed, or those students whose academic achievements are seriously deteriorating. In addition, students with behavioural concerns may also be raised during these meetings.

Students receiving ten or more As or pluses for effort are nominated for an Academic Commendation. Students will not receive a commendation when achieving a “minus” in any subject or when the records show a number of unexplained absences.

Form 4 students write formal end of year exams in term 3. These exams are conducted under official IGCSE exam regulations in order to familiarize the students for the final examinations the next year.

Form 5 students write trial examinations at the beginning of term 3. Students receive in-depth feedback about these examinations in class. The remainder of term 3 is dedicated to the completion of the IGCSE courses and revision of the work done.

Form 5 students wishing to study towards the IB Diploma programme should submit an application form to the IGCSE Coordinator. This process commences in Term 1 of Form 5 and will be discussed and explained in detail. Internal IB Diploma applications are discussed in a full staff meeting, which advises the IB Diploma selection committee meeting. This meeting is chaired by the Director of Studies.

Senior school (F6-7) – IB Diploma programme

Assessment practices in the senior school are aligned with the assessment philosophy and practices of the International Baccalaureate, and are designed to monitor progress and prepare the student for successful completion of the International Baccalaureate Diploma programme. The International Baccalaureate explicates its approach to assessment in a document called *Diploma Programme assessment: principles and practice*. Student and/or parents or guardians who wish to learn more about the workings of the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme assessment system and their underlying rationale should contact the IB Diploma Academic Coordinator.

Academic grades range from 7 to 1: 7 = excellent, 6 = very good, 5 = good, 4 = satisfactory, 3 = mediocre, 2 = poor, 1 = very poor. An N indicates that no grade has been awarded. Progress in Theory of Knowledge is graded on an A-E scale. A written report without grade is provided by the Extended Essay supervisor at the end of term 1 in IB2. Written reports without grades are provided for involvement in ComServe at the end of all terms except term 3 in IB2.

During mid-cycle meeting, students with more than two concerns are raised for discussion. During end-cycle, all students on a “failing condition” are discussed, or those students whose academic achievements are seriously deteriorating. In addition, students with behavioural concerns may also be raised during these meetings.

IB 1 students write formal end of year exams in term 3. These exams are conducted under official IB exam regulations in order to familiarize the students for the final examinations the next year.

IB2 students write trial examinations at the beginning of term 3. Students receive in-depth feedback about these examinations in class. The remainder of term 3 is dedicated to the completion of the IB courses and revision of the work done.

Further reading

The writing of the WK assessment policy was informed by the following publications:

Black, P. (1998) *Testing: friend or foe? Theory and practice of assessment and testing*. London: Falmer Press.

International Baccalaureate (2004) *Diploma Programme assessment: principles and practice*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organization.

International Baccalaureate (2010) *Guidelines for developing a school assessment policy in the Diploma Programme*. Cardiff: International Baccalaureate Organization.

Klenowski, V. (2002) *Developing portfolios for learning and assessment*. London & New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Newton, P. (2007) Clarifying the purpose of educational assessment. *Assessment in Education* 14(2): 149-170.

Peterson, A. D. C. (1971) *New techniques for the assessment of pupils' work*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

All queries relating to WKs Assessment Policy should be directed to the Director of Studies.

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